

# Fate Apocrypha

フェイト／アポクリファ

The sage cries out. "Open, Gates of Heaven. Bless us and bestow miracles upon us!"

ツークェツワンク

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*(Note: This is a short story that came out in Type Moon Ace Vol 10, which follows Assassin of Black and her Master Rikudou Reika before they went to Romania. It is not precisely a rewrite of the original “Act 1: Unbirth” short story that was released before the main volumes were published, but rather an additional tale that deals with events that the first short story did not cover and that takes into account details such as Sagara Hyouma being part of Yggdmillennia, which hadn’t yet been decided upon at the time of Unbirth’s writing.)*

### Fate Apocrypha: Zugzwang<sup>1</sup>

Sagara Hyouma didn’t understand.

He didn’t understand why he was lying on the ground here, why he was losing blood and why his eyes were filled with tears from overflowing pain.

Such a nightmare couldn’t be.

Such despair was impossible.

He should have been participating in the Great Holy Grail War as a magus and as a member of Yggdmillennia.

He had chosen a catalyst he was confident in. He had gotten a hold of knives that had actually been used by Jack the Ripper through his channels as a magus, and had proceeded to summon him in the Shinjuku district in Tokyo.

He was to control the Servant who most specialized in killing Masters—Assassin—in order to perform stealthy maneuvers in the war. That should have been the duty of the Black Master, Sagara Hyouma.

But now, not only was his throat crushed and his Command Spells forcefully ripped out, his Achilles tendons were cut and he couldn’t move at all.

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<sup>1</sup> Zugzwang: a situation found in chess wherein one player is put at a disadvantage because they must make a move when they would prefer to pass and not to move. A player is said to be "in zugzwang" when any possible move will worsen his position.

Why did it turn out like this?

After all, he still hadn't participated in the war yet. Even though he was recognized as Yggdmillennia's Seventh Master in the Great Holy Grail War, why was he on his knees and begging for his life?

He couldn't accept this as reality. His mind recalled the instant he was betrayed over and over again in a refrain.

Rikudou Reika was the start of how everything had failed. When he had tried to use her as a sacrifice (to be precise, he had tried to reproduce Jack the Ripper's crimes in order to maximize the summoning's chances of success), she had displayed greater resistance than he had expected. Because she had refused to be killed, the summoned Servant ended up choosing not him, but Reika, as her Master.

Even if he had Command Spells as a Master, he couldn't do anything if he was hit by a surprise attack. Moreover, the Servant he had summoned was Assassin—there was no way an ordinary magus like Hyouma could react in time to her attack speed.

Sagara Hyouma still didn't understand.

The Great Holy Grail War had already ended for him. Unable to even live miserably as a loser, he was in a situation where it wouldn't be strange if he was killed in the next instant.

Sagara Hyouma still didn't understand.

Why had Assassin of Black betrayed him? The unmatched serial killer who was famed for killing (at least) five prostitutes was a young, innocent-faced girl.

But she wasn't a Berserker. She had the appearance of a child, but she could hold a conversation, and based on her conversation with Reika, her intelligence didn't seem to be low either.

That's why he couldn't understand. Reika was an ordinary human, not a magus. Servants were familiars who obeyed their Masters. So why?

“Hey, Mother. Can we kill him yet?”

“Not yet. We still have a ton of things to ask him.”

A voice so calm it seemed false. Hyouma looked at the face of the woman he had tried to use as a sacrifice.

The woman, who should have been so foolish that he ensnared her just by whispering words of love in her ear, gazed at him.

There was no fear, hatred, sadness, malice, disdain or even displeasure in her eyes.

Hyouma shuddered.

Her gaze held only the madness of someone who could feel so indifferent towards another human being, and one who she had made love with so many times at that.

He felt as if he had been with a man-eating shark all this time.

“Hyouma-san.”

Even so, Rikudou Reika’s whisper was like sweet honey. Even though her expression contained not the slightest compassion, her voice alone was sweet.

“Tell me about the Holy Grail. About the war. About your true identity. About everything.”

—The Holy Grail which could grant all wishes.

It had been created by three great magi in the city of Fuyuki in the Far East, and it had been stolen by the head of Yggdmillennia, Darnic Prestone Yggdmillennia, sixty years ago using the help of the Third Reich of Nazi Germany.

And Darnic had declared the clan’s separation from the Association of Magi.

He built up a new organization using the Greater Grail as a symbol.

Naturally unable to accept this, the Association sent magi to reach the Greater Grail and brought about the Holy Grail War which shouldn’t have occurred, the Great Holy Grail War.

The Yggdmillennia clan were the Black camp and the Association magi were the Red camp. Each camp had seven Masters and seven Servants. It would undoubtedly be a battle that would shake the world of magecraft—

“Next.”

There were several rules in a Holy Grail War, and the Great Holy Grail War also followed them.

They would battle at night. They would avoid involving those who didn't enter into the domain of magi.

There were seven Servant classes. The Servants were beings who had carved their names into legend and myth. Servants should fight Servants, and Masters should fight Masters.

However, there was one class that was an exception.

That was Servant Assassin. Specializing in killing Masters, this class was both hated and feared by Masters.

Servants couldn't exist in the current age without Masters to act as spiritual anchors, and they couldn't fully unleash their power without a prana supply. That was why Servants had to protect their Masters.

“Next.”

Sagara Hyouma. A member of the Yggdmillennia clan. A magus who utilizes a style of magecraft that uses sacrifices, formed from a mix of Japanese cursing techniques and Western magecraft. An exploitive-type protective magecraft which uses human lives as sacrifices to establish the safety of a building or other human lives.

“Is there anything else?”

When he was asked about himself, there was nothing else he could say. Sagara Hyouma was an average magus living in the modern era.

He had ambition, but he lacked the skill. Though he was on the verge of destruction here, he knew no method to escape from it.

He scorned people who knew nothing of magecraft, but he understood that he himself was a second-rate magus worthy of scorn.

...He had wanted to win. Sagara Hyouma had intended to wager his life, honor and everything he had on this Great Holy Grail War. He had devoted himself to preparing for it as well.

—He made every possible preparation so that, even if he lost, he would have no regrets.

A magus' valuation of life was quite different from that of normal humans. Their primary objective of making children was to continue their bloodline and pass on their family's inheritance, the Magic Crest.

No matter how many lives of others he had to trample over, as long as it was necessary and wouldn't be exposed, he didn't care. Everything was for the sake of the Holy Grail. If it was for that, he would even sell his soul to every devil there was. He would kill his own relatives. He would trample over happy families without hesitation and kick over people suffering in misfortune.

With that conviction, Sagara had vied for the Holy Grail—and failed before he even managed to participate in battle, losing with no trace of his former self.

His Command Spells had been stolen. Even if he trained himself for a hundred years, he wouldn't be able to win against this monster that had the form of a very young girl.

Having everything stolen from him, he trembled in fear of death.

“That's true. You've lost everything, Hyouma-san. But it can't be helped. Because you were mistaken.”

What do you mean, it couldn't be helped? What was he mistaken about? No matter how he thought about it, he didn't understand. He hadn't made a single mistake.

“But Hyouma-san, you aren't suited for the act of killing one another. Even if you can trample over and take away from others—you don't have the sincerity to exchange life for life.”

Hyouma's thoughts froze.

“Yes, that’s right. You lied insincerely and tried to kill insincerely, and the result of that lack of prudence is your current state, Hyouma-san. You probably thought that you wouldn’t win in any straight-up battle of killing. Even though you can wager your own life, you’re unable to live while shouldering the lives of others, and because of that, you take an insincere attitude. Because you’re insincere, you show openings.”

Magi sometimes killed people, and sometimes killed things other than people. That was fine; killing was a natural fact. As long as humans existed, they would definitely kill other humans or things that weren’t human.

“But if you’re going to kill them face-to-face... you need to at least be sincere,” said Reika.

Jack the Ripper—Assassin ran up to her new Master Reika and whispered in her ear.

“Is that enough now?”

Those words were, in a sense, equivalent to a death sentence. Reika nodded and asked Assassin to lend her a knife. The fear of death immediately rose up in Hyouma’s throat.

At the same time, a sober emotion ruled his thoughts.

Sagara Hyouma was going to die. He was going to meet an extremely unseemly end of being rebelled against by his sacrifice, in this modern and inorganic Japanese apartment with not a trace of the beauty of magecraft——

That premonition of his became realized a second later.

While enduring overwhelming pain, Hyouma looked at Reika’s face.

Though she looked faintly sorrowful, her grip didn’t loosen on the knife she held. Even if it wasn’t intentional, she carved out his heart in the most painful manner.

In the midst of that agonizing pain, Hyouma understood.

He had never left anything worth being called an achievement in the field of magecraft. He had lived the life of a second-rate magus like a completely unnoticeable rat.

The magecraft of the Hyouma family would end here. But, although it couldn’t exactly be called an achievement——

*Ah, I've created an unimaginable monster.*

It was something that had nothing to do with magecraft. A Joker card that he had come across by chance.

He had unleashed the monster known as Rikudou Reika upon this world.

While feeling a strange sense of accomplishment, Sagara Hyouma died.

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...Three days after that, Rikudou Reika finished systematically reading all of the grimoires in Hyouma's apartment while idly playing with Assassin of Black.

"Why are you reading books?"

"It's in order to grant your wish, Jack. Unfortunately, we're going to have to fight on our own."

Though Reika had listened to the rules of the Holy Grail War from Hyouma, it still wasn't enough, so she was learning as much as she could about the war by reading his books.

Firstly, fighting by cooperating in a team of seven Servants and Master pairs as is done in the Great Holy Grail War—was impossible for them. Reika wasn't a proper Master. She was clearly an enemy from Yggdmillennia's perspective.

Even if they forgave her for that, logically speaking, there was no way they would leave Reika be as a Master. Because it was possible for Servants to change Masters in the middle of a war.

If there was some clause that prevented changing Masters once they were chosen, there might have been some room for negotiation, though.

"Hey, Jack."

"?"

The young girl with doll-like eyes tilted her head curiously. While finding that adorable gesture charming, Reika asked her.

"Are you really all right with me as your Master?"

"I can't supply your prana. You are... umm, a soul eater... was it? If you don't eat other souls, it will be impossible for you to even fight."



Rikudou Reika had made a contract as a Master that allows the manifestation of her Servant in this world. It was a ‘bond’ that allowed Assassin to exist. However, Servants couldn’t survive on that alone.

They needed prana in order to survive. And an enormous amount of prana at that.

Rikudou Reika had no prana. If she wanted Assassin to continue living, a different approach was necessary. They had to supply the needed prana by killing humans and having Assassin devour their souls.

Of course, if she used her Noble Phantasms, prana would be required for that as well. Each day Assassin lived, someone died—and more would continue to die.

“It’s fine. There’s no other *Master* for me besides *Mother*.”<sup>2</sup>

“I see.”

With that, her mind was decided. She would kill, kill as many people as possible and lovingly care for this little girl.

Rikudou Reika had died as a human. That day, when Sagara Hyouma had tried to use her as a sacrifice, she lost her reason to exist as Rikudou Reika.

Now, she was the Master of Jack the Ripper.

That alone was enough to give her a reason to live. So in order to live, she decided to fight. The path ahead was precipitous, complex and multifarious. She might die no matter what path she chose.

...But well, that was fine.

After all, Rikudou Reika had already died once.

She had nothing to be afraid of.

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—Things needed in the Great Holy Grail War.

Master, Servant, information, prana, fighting power (besides the Servant), a stronghold.

Final objective—grant wish with Holy Grail.

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<sup>2</sup> Here, Assassin alternates in using “Mother” and “Master” above both highlighted words.

Necessary process—kill the six other Black Servants, the Seven Red Servants and their Masters.

Necessary actions—securing of information, prana, fighting power and a stronghold.

Communicating in Romanian wasn't that hard for Reika. Since it was derived from Latin and was strongly influenced by Italian, the language was easy for her with her proficiency in language studies.

She could also converse in English. Since they weren't going sightseeing either, she would have no problems with talking with the locals.

The information she had on the city where the Great Holy Grail War would take place, Trifas, was extremely little. She had researched all there was to find in the history books on Romania in the library, but there was very little data on this city besides its population and size, and there were no famous tourist attractions there either.

Though there was a huge castle known as the Fortress of Millennia there, it wasn't advertised as a tourist attraction.

"Hmm," Reika pondered—and then decided to make an international phone call to the Romanian government's tourist bureau while pretending to be from a Japanese tour agency.

<You're quite good at speaking Romanian.>

"Thank you very much."

<So, for your tour destination, the first place to go to has got to be the capital Bucharest—"

"We're interested in going to Trifas."

After Reika cut off the other end's sales pitch and said that, the contact from Romanian was silent for a little while. And then he spoke out in a strangely lowered voice.

<...Trifas is quite an odd city to have your eye on, isn't it? Why there? The nearby city of Sighișoara is a far better recommendation, and in terms of public order as well.>

"Do you know of... the Fortress of Millennia?"

The contact gulped slightly. There was a nuance of surprise to his reaction, surprise at *how she knew about such a thing*. Even over the telephone, she could imagine his shocked expression.

"Actually, there's been a quiet boom lately among rich Japanese in visiting old overseas castles and—"



Before she could finish, the contact frantically interrupted her.

<Ah, it can't be done. That place is private property.>

“Private property? Really? It's a huge castle that occupies most of Trifas' land. Such huge castles are quite rare even in Europe. We'd really like to produce a tour there.”

<Sightseeing is strictly restricted there. Yes, of course we've also negotiated with the owner again and again to give permission, but—>

The contact's voice became more shrill and nervous. Reika knew that this was a sign he was 'lying'.

“In that case, we'd also like to contact the owner in order to negotiate—”

<No, that won't be possible. He... umm, really hates Asians.>

This was also another obvious 'lie'. Due to piling lies upon lies, his speech became even easier to see through. The way he was adding on this information he should have said beforehand was if he were bluntly saying, 'I'm frantically trying to smooth this over'.

“That's unfortunate to hear. Is there no hope of him changing his mind in the future?”

<Unfortunately not. So that's why we recommend Sighișoara. It's a wonderful city. The people there are simple, and it is the birthplace of Vlad III after all.>

“Vlad III—the vampire Dracula, huh.”

The instant Reika said that, the tone of the contact changed once again. It indicated a low, growling 'anger' on his part.

<With all due respect, miss, the vampire part is a mistaken image of him. Vlad III is our country's great hero. He protected Romania from the fearsome Mehmed II...>

“Ah, pardon me. That's true. Then, I think we'd like to make a different tour with Sighișoara as the destination. We'll contact you again later.”

<Yes, we'll be waiting...>

There was a sigh of relief from the other end just before the call ended. *I see*, thought Reika. Ever since she mentioned Trifas, the person on the other end had been on guard, and he had frozen at the mention of the Fortress of Millennia. It wasn't just that it was a taboo subject. Most likely, the person she had spoken with—was connected to Yggdmillennia in some way.

“Hey, hey.”

Perhaps interested in the phone call conversation, Jack had appeared in materialized form and brought her face near Reika.

“Did something happen?”

“There’s a Chinese proverb that says ‘If you do not enter the tiger’s cave, you will not catch its cub’.”

“?”

Seeing Jack’s confusion, Reika explained the proverb’s meaning.

“It’d be nice if the tiger cub comes to us thanks to this.”

“Are tiger cubs tasty?”

Hearing Jack’s innocent question, Reika patted her head.

—And as expected, ten magi visited Reika’s apartment that evening.

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3 AM. Choosing the time when there would be the fewest people on the streets, they set up a Boundary Field to clear out everyone nearby. People passing by, drunkards and even those living in this apartment building were induced to avoid coming near the building.

“We’ve finished confirming the presence of any spells. There are no other Boundary Fields set up nearby. There are no traces of any magecraft being used, and there is no sign of any disordered prana either.”

“All right, there’s no question that she’s here?”

About ten men and woman were there dressed in outfits that didn’t draw attention. They were plain, commonplace suits. However, if the wrong person saw them, they might notice something abnormal about them. They were the quick disposal squad of the Einskaya family, a group within Yggdmillennia which utilizes group spells. They were the assassins directly under Darnic’s command—the [Zugzwang].

“There’s no mistake. If possible, we will capture the woman who spoke on the phone and question her.”

Relatives of the Yggdmillennia clan lived across the world, and their network wasn’t to be underestimated.



Should contact by an outsider relating to the Fortress of Millennia or Trifas be confirmed, they would investigate and deal with the perpetrator within twenty-four hours no matter where they were in the world. That was the main duty of [Zugzwang].

Their skills as magi wasn't that high, but they were some of the best when it came to combat experience within the clan. In combat, skill in magecraft wasn't that important as long as there wasn't an overwhelming difference between the opposing sides. The vital point was how far you understood your own magecraft and applied it to battle.

"The Great Holy Grail War is going to begin soon. That person's orders are to eliminate any possible obstacles."

A man with a black-coated dagger and blowpipe in his hands spoke. The dagger and the darts of the blowpipe had paralysis poison coated on them. This poison, made for use against magi, did affected not only the body, but also someone's Magic Circuits, and though it didn't completely stop them, it did remarkably slow down their ability to weave spells.

"The location where we detected her is in the apartment N.903 on the ninth floor. We'll take a multi-directional siege formation. Pawn 1 and Pawn 2 will guard the first floor and neutralize the surveillance cameras. Pawn 3 and Pawn 4 will go to the rooftop. Pawns 5 to 8 will come with me to the ninth floor. We'll break in through the outer wall. Eliminate all witnesses. Understood? Pile together your arms' Magic Crests. Increase the rank in tandem with me. 3, 2, 1—Integration start."

The Magic Crest of Zugzwang was divided among them. Half of it was possessed by the King, and the other half was possessed by those who were designated as Pawns. Normally, it was only powerful enough to somewhat supplement their Magic Circuits.

However, by having them all activate the Magic Crest together like this, the Crest demonstrated its original power. That was to link with the power and minds of the others. It was a form of magecraft which didn't raise their power individually, but increased all of their powers to the level of the King.

Naturally, the price was enormous. This magecraft which abuses their bodies and Magic Circuits beyond their limits was truly just like doping. In exchange for temporarily raising their abilities, the Pawns lost the general utility of their Magic Circuits and could only exist as 'soldier ants'. Naturally, their lifespan after being turned into soldier ants was extremely short—but they had no regrets about being sacrificial pieces for the prosperity of their clan.

"Charge!"

The first two immediately disabled the surveillance cameras in the entranceway, and the remaining seven lightly jumped through the air with weight-reducing magecraft and climbed the outer wall up to the ninth floor. With nimble lizard-like movements, five of them reached the fifth floor in the blink of an eye. The last two went up to the rooftop and prepared to intercept any attempts to escape through the air.

Escape was impossible. Even if the enemy was a first-rate magus, no one could win against the teamwork of these nine. The members of Zugzwang broke through the entranceway door and rushed into the apartment—

The next instant, they noticed the abnormality there.

The members of Zugzwang, who possessed the ability to equally share their perception without having to give orders, all spread out at once. It was a display of superb reaction speed that surpassed human limits. But Zugzwang's combat skills only worked on enemies of the same status as them.

They were extremely skilled game animals who efficiently hunted every form of beast using equal power spread among them.

However—the enemy wasn't a game animal like them, let alone a hunted herbivore.

“Ah————”

When the enemy was a steel monster that didn't even need to worry about the fangs of beasts, their spell which they had spent two hundred years refining didn't work at all.

At first, the Pawns thought a cool wind had passed through. An innocent wind that passed through them—

Their field of vision suddenly changed. The ceiling became the floor and the floor became the ceiling. And they were falling. Even though there was no sensation of falling, the scenery alone fell downwards. As if they were watching a film moving at ultra-high speeds.

Did they understand that it was because their heads had been cut off? Either way, in just a slight fraction of a second, the 'Pawns' had lost.

*Impossible... why, why is this...? How could this... be possible...!*

The only survivor, King, understood he was just lucky just to be alive. He had merely been in a fortunate location. He just happened to not be in the path of *it*.

His heartbeat hammered in his chest. He hadn't escaped death. What stood before his eyes was a walking disaster—a being that existed on a plane that couldn't be reached by the power of a magus.

“A Servant...!?”



The decisive weapon in the Holy Grail War. The peerless and strongest being that manifests a Heroic Spirit of legend in the mold of a class.

The young girl clad in a beguiling and provocative bodysuit waved her knife, and the blood of the Pawns trickled off it to the floor with a splashing sound.

Her doll-like eyes pierced King. His vision broke down so much he wanted to laugh. He understood that his ‘death’, which he hadn’t truly felt despite tasting it many times until now, was approaching reality.

“—You.”

But the girl whispered in an innocent voice with her innocent face.

“You will be killed by my *Mother*.”

And then, she jumped through the destroyed entrance door and jumped down to the ground below from the outer passageway, her form disappearing in the blink of an eye.

The reaper of death had gone, leaving King be.

But the member of Zugzwang wasn’t foolish enough to optimistically think he had been spared. Just now, that Servant had said “Mother” and “Master” at the same time in a muffled voice.

Master. In other words, the one who controlled that Servant was here.

While his hair tensely stood on end, the only remaining survivor ‘King’ readied his dagger and blowpipe whilst standing amidst a sea of flesh.

Half of their Magic Crest completely vanished in less than a minute. In other words, it meant all of the other eight Zugzwang members he had brought as his doubles this time had been annihilated.

He was alone.

He was alone, but even so, King didn’t lose sight of his remaining chance to survive.

Because Servants were Heroic Spirits that manifested in the current age through the contract with their Masters. If the Master died, the Servant would quickly run out of prana and disappear.

The idea that he could fight and win against a Servant was more than a fairy tale. He wouldn’t last a second if he fought that thing.

His only chance to survive was to kill its Master. That Servant had also said it. ‘You will be killed by my Master’...

He strained his nerves. Though he systematically and unfalteringly ran his Magic Circuits and completely devoted himself to the linkage of his Magic Crest, the King of Zugzwang couldn’t really use any high-level magecraft.

Their only magecraft was produced within their body—a spell that perfectly prepared their bodies as much as possible and raised their specs to the maximum.

King reacted instantly to a sudden bang. He blew his blowpipe and cut with his dagger at the shadowy figure that had suddenly appeared.

But he immediately realized that that was a mistake.

“...Sagara Hyouma...”

The magus of a small Far Eastern family, who should have been chosen as a Master in the Great Holy Grail War. He had died while wearing a strange smile on his face.

King understood from the stiffened feeling of Sagara Hyouma’s flesh. King hadn’t killed him—this man had died much earlier. But why had this corpse suddenly appeared before him? When he looked closely, he saw that he was hung up with a rope around his neck without his feet touching the floor.

He examined the corpse for a little while, and then understood. His neck and feet had simply been tied to the ceiling with cord, and the cord around his feet had been made to sever after some time passed.

But for what purpose?

—The answer to that was simple. It was in order to grasp King’s abilities.

Just as Sagara Hyouma had thought on the verge of death, Rikudou Reika had a monster inside her. It wasn’t simply that she had conspicuously antisocial feelings.

Rather, it was the exact opposite. She was a loving monster who, while embedding herself into society and acknowledging her own deeds as evil, would still calmly kill even a baby if it was for the sake of the little girl who believed in her.

And she fully demonstrated that monstrous part of her in this Holy Grail War—and in this battle against Zugzwang as well.

The Zugzwang members sent by Yggdmillennia would have all been dealt with in an instant if she left things to Assassin of Black. Even an amateur Master like Reika understood that well. But this situation today was the only chance for her to fight a magus in as safe conditions as possible.

Reika had read the piles of grimoires that Hyouma had left behind and deepened her understanding of the principles of magecraft and of the ‘people’ who used it, even if she couldn’t use it herself.

They utilized techniques and principles that surpassed human knowledge, and if it was for the sake of the pursuit of magecraft, any and all sacrifices were permissible for them.

Naturally, if the interests of different magi were in conflict, they would fight and kill each other. While fighting, they used magecraft. As long as they weren’t seen by a third party (and even if they were, there would be no problem if witnesses were eliminated), they would battle each other with the magecraft their families had spent many years piling up.

Of course, there was no room for modern weapons to interfere there. An expert magus would have no problem dealing with any individual small arms.

According to what she read about magecraft within the grimoires, they were those kinds of beings.

Reika had to fight such fearsome beings as a Master.

Even if she and Assassin were blessed with unexpected luck, there would only be a few chances for them to use surprise attacks against other Masters without their Servants interfering. At most, once or twice. That was the limit.

But, it was a different story if Reika killed them.

If she simply tried to kill them rather than engage in a mutual test of skill as magi, even Reika could find a slight possibility to succeed.

This battle was a test for that.

Reika had already grasped that King’s magecraft enhanced his physical abilities.

The spell likely extended to his nerves too, which was why he attacked so swiftly earlier before he even saw Sagara Hyouma’s corpse.

And even in his current state, he had failed to hear even the slightest sound from Reika.



In other words.

It meant—*she could deal with him.*

The sound he heard was extremely unnatural, and it was ringing from Sagara Hyouma. King searched his pockets—but didn't find anything. Moreover, he noticed something terrifying while he was searching for the source of the sound.

He gulped. The sound was ringing from somewhere he couldn't identify. He lifted up Hyouma's shirt. Hyouma's abdomen was clumsily sewn with stiches. It definitely wasn't the work of a physician.

He cut the stiches with his dagger—and a cell phone came bursting out along with entrails.

“Damn it.”

He didn't want to touch it, but the phone's shrill ringing grated even worse on his sharpened hearing and dealt endless pain to King's brain. Losing to his anger, he took the cell phone and smashed it to pieces on the floor with his foot.

It was then that he realized.

He had shirked his vigilance towards his surroundings for just an instant. Even if he was an expert magus and had enhanced his physical abilities to superhuman heights, he had inevitably slackened for an instant. He was too shocked by the abnormality of the cell phone lodged in the stomach, and was too slow in noticing the presence behind him.

The woman who had an inner monster easily came around from behind King—

“Checkmate.”

And without an instant of hesitation or mercy, she swung a large razor at his neck and cut his trachea.

King let loose a cry of surprise and tried to grab the woman that had appeared before him, but he slipped on Sagara Hyouma's entrails and fell down.

After he had fallen into a crouch, Reika swung the razor once again. Carefully and precisely. Magi died harder compared to regular humans—she had also learned this from the grimoires.

This was her second time killing someone, so she felt even less emotion than the first time. *I don't feel any joy from it, so I must not be suited as a maniacal murderer*, thought Reika.

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Dealing with the magi on the ground floor and rooftop was as easy as clapping their shoulders to Assassin of Black.

She hadn't received any particular orders from Reika to hide or not wound the bodies, so she killed them as she liked and devoured their hearts.

Her only worry was her *Mother*. *We should go check*, thought Assassin as she looked up at the ninth floor from the apartment building's entrance.

Rikudou Reika waved her hand from the ninth floor's outer passageway. Jack frantically jumped up to the ninth floor.

"*Mother...* Are you okay?"

Reika was covered all over in blood. Jack was also similarly covered in blood. But it didn't seem she was hurt, and Reika giggled in her usual manner.

"Yes, I'm fine. Now, Jack. Go finish eating. After that we have to pack our suitcases and prepare to go to Romania. We have to buy clothes for you too, Jack."

"Clothes? Even though I don't need any?"

Clothes were unnecessary if she went into spiritual form. But Reika pouted and rejected that.

"That's no good. Isn't it boring that way? If you're with me, Jack, the long flight to Romania will surely be fun. So let's buy you some clothes. And then we'll board the plane."

"Is that fun?"

*Hmm, will this really be fun for Jack*—Reika was slightly worried, but she immediately came up with a conclusion. Touching her finger to Jack's cute nose, Reika answered.

"Jack, you can't know something unless you try it."

—For instance, Jack might look cute wearing different clothes.

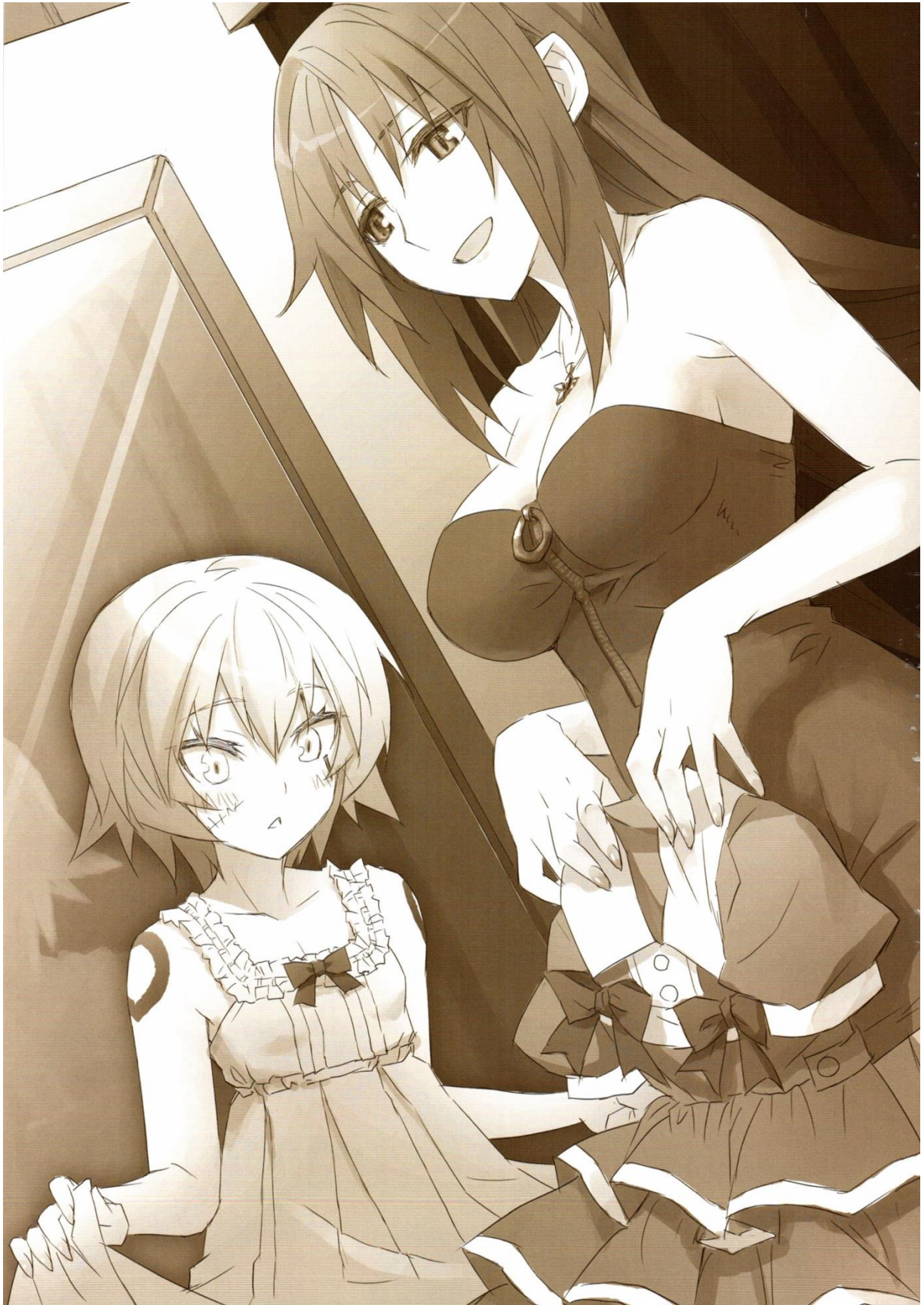
—For instance, they might win this war where they had no chances of winning.

—For instance, they might be blessed with happiness by the magic-like object that could grant all wishes.

And even if none of those came true.

The happiness filled with love right here and now wasn't negated.

“Come on, let's go, Jack. What kind of clothes would suit you?”





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